

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12 AND 10:23

September 9, 1998 (David W. Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, www.wayoflife.org) – Many ecumenical types use 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23 to excuse their worldly lifestyle, but consider those verses in their context:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-13 -- "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body."

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-24 -- "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."

These verses are frequently misused today by those who desire liberty to fulfill their carnal desires. These would have us believe that the Apostle Paul is saying the Christian has liberty to wear immodest clothing and watch indecent movies and go to the beach half naked and listen to wicked rock music, to fellowship with anyone who says he "loves Jesus" regardless of his doctrinal beliefs, etc. Is that what the Holy Spirit through Paul meant by the statement "all things are lawful unto me"? By no means! Obviously there are limitations on the Christian's liberty. The New Testament Scriptures, in fact, put great limits upon our "liberty." We are not free to commit fornication (1 Cor. 6:16–18; 1 Thess. 4:3–6), nor to be involved in any sort of uncleanness (1 Thess. 4:7), nor to fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), nor to be drunk with wine (Eph. 5:18), nor to allow any corrupt communication to proceed out of our mouths (Eph. 4:29), nor to allow any filthiness of the flesh or spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), nor to be involved in anything which has even the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), nor to love the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15–17), nor to befriend the world (James 4:4), nor to dress immodestly (1 Tim. 2:9), etc.

What, then, did the Apostle mean? He meant that the Christian has been set free by the blood of Christ, free from the wages of sin, free from the condemnation of the law, free from the ceremonies of the Mosaic covenant, but not free to sin, and not free to do anything which is not expedient or edifying. He explains himself perfectly in both passages. In 1 Corinthians 6:12–13, he uses the example of eating meat. In 1 Corinthians 8:1–13 and 10:23–28 he uses the example of eating things which have been offered to idols. In all such things like that, the Christian is free. There are no dietary restrictions for the New Testament Christian as there were under the Mosaic law. We do not have to fear idols; we know they are nothing. This is the type of thing Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians, if we allow him to explain himself in the very context of the statements, rather than attempt to put some strange meaning upon his words which would fill the Bible with contradiction. He addresses exactly the same thing in Romans chapter 14. The Christian is free from laws about eating and keeping holy days (Rom. 14:2–6). We are not to judge one another in these matters. This does not mean we are not to judge anything and that we are free

to do whatever we please. Such a philosophy is obviously contrary to the entire tenor of the New Testament writings and is an appalling perversion of these passages.

FOUR TESTS FOR CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES

In the two passages in Corinthians Paul gives four tests to determine whether the Christian should allow a certain thing in his life: (1) Does it bring me under its power? (2) Is it expedient? (3) Does it edify? (4) Does it help or hinder my fellow man, does it cause my fellow man to stumble? Again, these are tests which are applied not to sinful things which already are forbidden to the Christian, but to things the Bible does not specifically address. The sincere application of these tests to things commonly allowed in the world of popular Christianity would put a quick stop to many practices. Rock music does bring people under its power; it does not spiritually edify; it is influenced by demons (a simple study of the history of rock music will confirm this) and is not therefore expedient for the Christian who is instructed to be sober and vigilant against the wiles of the devil; it appeals to the flesh which the Christian is supposed to crucify. Immodest clothing, such as shorts and bathing suits, does hinder our fellow man by putting before him a temptation to sin in his thought life; it does not edify those who see us clothed in such a fashion; it does cause others to stumble. Ecumenical relationships between those who believe sound New Testament doctrine and those who do not, hinders my fellow man and causes him to stumble by confusing him about what is true and what is false Christianity, by giving him the impression that doctrine is not important; such relationships are not edifying because they weaken the believer's spiritual discernment and zeal for the faith once delivered to the saints.

The Bible says we have liberty in Christ, liberty from eternal condemnation, liberty to serve Christ and to enjoy our unspeakably wonderful salvation in Christ, but not liberty to sin, not liberty to do whatever we please with our lives, not liberty to do anything which is not expedient or edifying. The Apostle Paul had such a low view of "personal liberty" that he was willing to forego the eating of meat for the rest of his life if he thought that such eating would offend his brother or cause his brother to stumble in any way (1 Cor. 8:13). He did not have the idea that he was in this world to live as he pleased. Contrast this view of Christian liberty with that which is so popular today. Those who are consumed with their "liberty" will not forego even highly questionable things for the sake of glorifying Christ and edifying their fellow man. When confronted with such things, they become puffed up and lash out against a straw man they call "legalism."